

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

Remarks by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland at a meeting with the staff of the U. S. Department of Agriculture--sponsored by OPEDA--The Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Friday, March 4, 1977 at 9:00 a.m.

Rose

Introductory remarks by Rose Musumeci of the Food and Nutrition Service and former Board Member of OPEDA.

a 821

A8384

"I'm Rose Musumeci of the Food and Nutrition Service and I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of OPEDA--The Organization of Professional Employees of the Department of Agriculture. I am proud to be a member of OPEDA. I have been since 1958. I have also served as a Board Member

"OPEDA bridges the gap between the professional employees and the front office. It helps ensure equal opportunity and secure retirement. It speaks for you on Capitol Hill, and in each state and city in this land of ours. It fights for your rights and pay--equal pay--and better working conditions.

"This is the third and last question and answer dialogue between USDA employees and the Secretary of this series here in the Jefferson Auditorium. We have others in the planning stage.

"It now gives me great pleasure to introduce President Dick Ford."

President Ford: "Thank you Rose. OPEDA welcomes the opportunity to sponsor these discussions between the Secretary and USDA employees. To some of you who haven't been around as long as some of the rest of us, it is a first for a Secretary to take the time to make repeated appearances so that all who wish to participate in these open discussions with the Secretary may have the opportunity.

"Many people have expressed to me their appreciation in the Secretary's willingness to take time for these get acquainted chats. His willingness to appear repeatedly and his forthright candor in answering questions is proof to many of us that home folks make the greatest secretaries. And speaking of home folks, welcome back Bob Bergland, Secretary of the USDA, the best Department in the Federal Government."

Secretary Bergland: "Thank you very much. It is good to be home. I've spent all of my life in agriculture. Farmed for 27 years, spent 6 years here in the Department during the 1960's, with ASCS and during these last 6 years I've served on the Committee in Agriculture in the Congress of the United States. And so I'm rather well aware of the enormous body of talent which we have in this Department of Agriculture. I am aware of our missions. I am aware of the frustrations we share on a daily basis, and delighted to have a chance to spend some time visiting with you as professionals in a professional organization.

"And while this has been announced as the last of this series, it doesn't mean that it is the end of this sort of a relationship. We plan to continue to hold these gatherings from time to time. There is some question about whether we should have general sessions or whether we should have programs aligned along a functional arrangement combining agencies so we can talk more shop and maybe less of a general nature. But I can assure you that I intend to continue with these arrangements because I get more from them than you do, I think. I need ideas. I need help, and you're the ones who can provide both. Without your ideas and without your help, this agency, this Department, this mission will flounder and the world will be the loser.

"You have seen in the newspapers that we've had some trouble getting staffed in the cage and there around, I have one here today who finally passed the test. Lee Corcoran, who is my Executive Assistant, is on stage. I would like to have him stand and you take a look at him. If you see him around, you'll know who he is. And others will be coming on shortly, I hope, and we can proceed with the filling out of our entire staff and I know that you will be as excited about what is taking place as I am.

"I was born on July 22, 1928. That makes me 48 years of age. Born into a world with two billion souls and now there are four billion, and growing at the rate of two hundred thousand a day. If God gives me 30 years and if this trend continues, the world's population will double again in our lifetime. Such is the magnitude of the problems, the opportunities, and exciting challenges confronting this Department.

"In my lifetime, we've seen the invention of the hybrid seed corn, the invention of commercial fertilizers and pesticides, and the application of this enormous technology and the doubling and tripling of yields. During that time our major domestic agricultural problem has been the question of what do we do with this enormous abundance? And so we've had crop controls and bin side programs and marketing agreements and acreage allotments and all the rest.

"During this period, we've seen the world's population continue to grow--two hundred thousand every day. Every ten days, a new greater Washington Metropolitan area to feed. And at the same time we lose one million acres of crop land in the United States to highways, airports, shopping centers and sewage lagoons. And that trend has continued for sometime and we now see the beginning of the end of some of our non-renewable resources.

"We know that rock phosphate fields in Florida will not last forever. We know that natural gas from which nitrogen comes will not last forever. We know that petroleum will not last forever. And we wonder sometimes, if a thousand years hence, when historians document this era whether they will talk about that civilization that blossomed and flourished, and died, based on a chemical known as petroleum. It died because it failed to conserve. It died because it failed to realize and heed the signals that God had given us.

"And so we have enormous burdens placed upon us. Trying to figure out how we can use these resources in the most prudent fashion. That means that it is going to be difficult for a lot of us. We're all creatures of habit. We get up about the same time each day. We eat about the same breakfast. We drive about the same kind of car. We wear about the same kind of clothes, and we eat lunch at noon, and we have dinner at night. We have television sets and we have sort of a life style with which we're comfortable. We're comfortable with yesterday because we've lived that. We know what that was like. Tomorrow is a new frontier. Tomorrow is a new adventure, and for many that is unsettling because we don't know what tomorrow will be like. But one thing is sure, tomorrow is not like yesterday.

"And so the scale with which this Administration, this Government will be tested is by the manner in which we are able to use and develop food, both at home and abroad. And the skill that we can demonstrate and the creativity which we can develop in using food as a developmental tool to aid the two hundred thousand born each day, because those two hundred thousand born each day are born very poor. And our skills will be tested by the extent with which we can convert that need, which is apparent, into demand, which is not. And using American food aid in the proper and skillful fashion, I think, will do more to bring peace to this world for all time than anything else this government can do. So, we have enormous responsibilities placed upon us. An exciting time, actually.

"I know there are those who say that government is stifling. And that is simply not true. We may have stifling systems within this Department and we're going to examine every system. Nothing is sacrosanct. We're going to look at everything that we've done and everything that we are doing to find out whether or not there might not be a better way.

"Probably, many among you have skills that are not being fully utilized. Let's find those skills; develop them; help you. Maybe we have supervisors who can't supervise. If so, then they ought to be put in jobs where they are competent--not beyond their competence.

"We want to help. We want to train. We want to encourage. We invite your suggestions, your recommendations, your criticisms, and we're prepared to look at every proposition to see whether or not it might be applied Department-wide. To see what we can do to bring forth

the brightest and best in everyone so this Department continues in the tradition of the Department of Agriculture--the best in the Federal establishment. And I'm proud to be a member of this organization. Proud to be with you, and to be here on this day.

"And with that, in keeping with our tradition, we'll devote the balance of the time from now until 10 o'clock to questions and answers."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, having been here as long as Rose, I am concerned about the poor and the small family farmer. I am also concerned about many black minority employees within the Department who find themselves in positions in which we find, not the skill of the individual that counts, but who he knows who counts, in terms of moving up the scale, fully utilizing his talents and being promoted on a fair basis with others. I would be interested to know what would you do in response to such criticism, and secondly would you be willing to meet with a group of concerned minority employees within the Department to discuss specific concerns with you?"

Secretary Bergland: "The strength of this nation is its diversity. We are literally a community of nations composed of minorities. I am one. I am Norwegian and white. Some of you are Irish, some of you are Black, some of you are Jamaican, some are American-Indian.

"I was six years in a system in which power was accorded to those who acquired longevity by simply growing old in the House of Representatives. We amended that system during the last six years to provide opportunity to those who have promise and who can make a contribution.

"While I don't intend to impose quotas in terms of hiring minorities, women, blacks or any other group, I mean business when I talk about the question of equal opportunity and civil rights. There'll be no games played with me or with anyone else. If we have people within this Department who are practicing discrimination, they will be invited to leave. If I find that anyone in this Department is discriminating against employees because of their race, their religion, their sex, or their color, I will initiate action against those who discriminate. I will not permit it under any circumstances and I want everybody to understand how this place will be run.

"Now, we need to set up a process by which we're certain that there is indeed discrimination. And that is a difficult matter because there are some, I know, who have been denied their within-grade increase and the oftentimes complaint is discrimination, when, in fact, that was not the case. So we must be careful that we don't overuse the word and destroy its importance, but reserve the use of that word to those few cases in which the charge is warranted. And where it is warranted, you can be assured that I will take affirmative action without question.

"I would be delighted to meet with groups of any kind, any type, at any time I can arrange it. We do have an incredibly busy schedule. We're trying to get our new farm bill, our new food stamp program and a whole host of measures to present to the Congress on the 16th and 17th of this month.

"I've only been here a month and we've got a mess on our hands. So you've got to bear with me. We'll get this thing going. We're in the same ship and we got to paddle it in the same direction. But give me another month to get our legislative agenda in order so that I can meet the deadlines imposed by the President and the Congress, and after that we're going to attend to matters which are as important.

"And I will be pleased to meet with you, sir, and anyone whom you may choose to sit down and talk about problems which may have occurred in the past. And I am not interested in finding fault. I am not interested in pointing fingers of blame at anybody for anything

that has gone on. I don't care about that. I'm interested in tomorrow, and next week, and next year. But if there have been mistakes, I would like to hear about them only so that we can profit and not repeat them."

Employee: "Regarding your statement about unused skills, particularly, but also about suggestions and recommendations, how would you propose that we get those to you?"

Secretary Bergland: "I really don't know how to do that yet, but we're sure going to find out. We're going to try something that has never been tried before. You've read about it in the newspapers. It is called zero-based budgeting.

"Now, the object of that is not necessarily to save a pile of money. If we can save, obviously we want to because it is your tax money and mine that we're talking about along with everybody else's. So we don't want to waste anything for any purpose at all.

"The zero-based budgeting system is a management tool so that we can tell whether managers are managers or not. If supervisors can't supervise, or don't know how, they'll be put into jobs that are not above their heads.

"On the other hand, if we have people who have talents that are needed, but are not being developed or utilized, then let's take an inventory of those talents. We therefore, through the zero-based budgeting process, will have management tools which we have never had so that we can discover those talents which have gone unused or wasted or undeveloped and see what we can do to match the talents with the job.

"Now almost all of you are qualified for any grade 16 job in this place. I know that. But we don't have that many slots. So we have to figure out how to work this thing out in a fair, reasonable, and equitable manner. I don't know exactly how to do it, but I can tell you we're sure going to try, and if you have any ideas, if your organization has any recommendations in this regard, I'll be all ears."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, I believe that one of the most important contributions to the well being of this nation ever made by any agency of government at any period in American History is the Department of Agriculture's definition of prime farm land and our policy that these lands must be protected from conversion to non-agricultural use. However, much remains to be done in informing the American public about this issue at the state and local levels. What continuing initiative do you foresee by the Department in keeping this alive--very much alive--across the nation?"

Secretary Bergland: "This goes to the heart of a proposition which has caused trouble for a hundred years, and that is the inevitable collision between private rights and the public interest.

"I have a piece of land. It's mine. I bought it. I paid for it. I can do with it as I wish. Heard that before? Does that mean I should be permitted to let it blow away? Wash away? That land is only mine for 40 years or so.

"And so we have this question, which would transcend the other. Private rights or the public interest?

"We've had attempts to reconcile that over the last few years in the name of Federal Land Use Planning guidance. They've all been shot down. I was involved in some of those fights. I supported those propositions. They've been shot down because people said it's none of your business. I can do that with my land which I choose. It is mine. I have a deed.

"We've got to come to grips with that question first. And that is probably going to take a continuing job of education and strong leadership, on the part of the President, me, and those of you, and all of us in this country, to acquaint our citizens with the awful rea-

lity, the inevitable disaster which will arise if we allow the paving over of a million acres of good land. The loss of 15 tons of top soil a second out of the mouth of the Mississippi River can't continue and so the question is how do we come to grips with it?

"One is the process of continuing the education. I hope that this Administration can support the Federal incentives and land use planning that has been pending in the Congress for sometime instead of vetoing the proposition. That bill will not preempt state and local authorities in the matter of zoning. It will simply give them guidance, support and encouragement to do a better job to preserve the class one lands.

"The United States has half the good land in the entire world. And if we destroy ours, what chance does the world have of surviving for more than a generation or two in the style to which we've become accustomed. No chance, obviously.

"I think legislation will be of some value, but more importantly, we need to acquaint the population with the inevitability of the collision course on which we find ourselves. I think there has been a tendency to leave things to chance and hope that somehow all would be well. And I'm not prepared to do that. We're prepared to take positions on controversial issues because they'll be done only after we're sure they're right and then nothing will stop us."

Employee: "I have questions in three areas, Mr. Secretary, and I would like to ask them one at a time. You've already mentioned that our primary business is food and if anybody should know about it, it should be USDA. With all of our home economists, nutritionists, experimental food production, etc., etc., we really ought to eat better here than in many military mess halls, and we should have the highest food service standards in the U. S. So, why do we have to put up with the GSI type food service?"

Secretary Bergland: "Listen, I can't stand those tacos, either, and I eat them every day. No, I eat whatever is on the mess, because I eat in the public dining rooms here in this place. I figure that is one way I can find out what is going on. And brother, you are right! We're examining all of the facilities in this place. We're looking into the security systems here. And I've got some strong views about that. We're examining every corner that this place has let. I think that we can make things work better. Give me some time, would you?"

Employee: "You've already mentioned just a little bit about this--justify your own job, one page, tell it like it is type thing with zero-based budgeting. There was an article a few weeks ago, the only thing I've seen in writing, by Mike Causey of The Washington Post about this. And one thing in there, it said that these will be submitted up through channels. Don't you think that this will discourage complete honesty of the employees if they have to submit it to their immediate superiors?"

Secretary Bergland: "I think it would. You know what I'm about to say is probably going to get me in big trouble. But I think these performance reports we got around here are a disaster. They're required by law, I think. So we probably have to do something to stay out of jail.

"But from a management perspective--you know I used to fill those things out--I tell you they are not worth the paper they are written on.

"I don't know who designed it and I'm not a personnel expert. I'm no expert but I do know people. You know I was a GS-15 Area Director for ASCS, to let the cat out of the bag for those of you who didn't know, and nothing used to burn me up more than have someone, who was under my general direction, come to me with a complaint about one that they supervised and wanted me to fire them or take an adverse action suit, and when we would go in the record, we would find that six months before they had been given an above average performance report.

"Now, that tells you something about the system. You know I don't think it is any good and I suppose there'll be professional personnel people who'll sail into me and we'll settle

this one. But the fact is, I think, it is an ineffective way of developing a good harmonious relationship between a supervisor and those who are supervised. There has got to be a better way and I don't know what better way we can find, but we're sure going to look.

"And I think that there is a danger if we require, or ask, a junior person to fill out a one-page summary on what he or she does, and how he or she might think he or she could improve his or her life. If it goes directly through the system, there may be an opportunity for some recriminations, I don't know. We want to remove that. We don't want this to be a stifling organization. We want it to flourish and flower and grow.

"And maybe we'll leapfrog supervisors. Maybe we'll do it through another system. Maybe we can have an ombudsman here. Maybe we have some other scheme that we can work out so that we're sure we're getting the truth. Truth about everybody. About me and you. We don't need to, and won't, break confidences, obviously. And we don't want to interrupt a sensitive arrangement. We don't want to be offensive about this, or crude, or crass, just approach it from a perspective of common sense.

"And so I don't know exactly how we are going to do what you suggested, but you are right, we've got to find a way and we'll talk to some experts, and you're probably as expert as anybody--I mean, you folks, as to how we get the job done."

Employee: "My final question. I'm with ASCS, Mr. Secretary, and I was wondering if you know how soon we will have an administrator and could you tell us who you might have recommended for the job?"

Secretary Bergland: "I hope we have an administrator by next Tuesday. I probably better not tell you who I recommended because he might not take the job. He is talking to his wife. She's got to move here and she doesn't think she wants to leave Mississippi."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, The Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs has recommended that Americans reduce their sugar consumption by 40%; salt by 50 to 85%; fat by 10%, and also increase their intake of complex carbohydrates. In light of these recommendations, do you think the policy of the Department of Agriculture will remain--all food is good food. Or will the Food and Nutrition Service now be permitted to promote good nutrition and set an example by saying such things as: An orange is a better snack than a doughnut or potato chips; plain oatmeal is a better cereal food choice than a highly sweetened cereal. It often seems that concerns and interests of the food industry take precedence over the health and well-being of our nation's citizens."

Secretary Bergland: "We're going to tell it like it is. And this is not going to go down so good with some folks. But we have got to tell it like it is. We're making some changes here in the Department. You probably read about some of them and it is kind of unsettling. People think we are kind of opening up the tiger cages, but we're going to broaden our perspective.

"I've recommended to the President that we set up a new Assistant Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Affairs, and I have recommended that we appoint a person to that post who has a good understanding of the needs of the consumer. A Carol Foreman type, if you know what I mean. And he has agreed to do this.

"Now, some say what are you doing here? Are you out of your mind? You know this is a Department of Agriculture.

"Listen, I farmed 27 years. The consumer is my customer, not my enemy. It isn't a person with whom we fight, quarrel, argue and get into big hassles in the supermarket, and boycotts, and stone throwing and name calling and shouting and screaming.

"No. Let's cool it. Simmer down here now and let's talk this thing out and figure out how we're going to work this thing together. There is no point in growing something the consumer doesn't want. The consumer understands that a bankrupt agriculture isn't going to be good for anybody. We have to have a strong agriculture and we have to have a well fed population. That will be our objective.

And so, we're going to make changes in the Food and Nutrition Service. Some of these are going to be painful and I can't specifically comment on what you've said in terms of the report to which you referred because I haven't read that report. But, I had better. We are going to, however, have our Food and Nutrition Service tell it like it really is.

"I saw something this morning which you probably have been reading about lately, and that is the impact of dairy products on the human body--some species of the human race. Now, what effect this will have ultimately, we don't know. But it has been suggested that dairy products are harmful. Now if that is proven in fact, I'm in trouble. I'll tell you that right now. But I'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

"And we are going to develop systems that will enable us to give consumers honest advice about what is best and what is bad. And we peddle a lot of junk.

"I was on the Committee that rewrote, or attempted to rewrite, the food stamp program two years ago, and I know something about that business. We tried to get at the business of trying to discourage consumers from using food stamps to buy junk food by having certain prohibited items. Well, the problem was that many of the items we were going to permit were almost worthless. But they were regarded as nutritional by the general public perception, not by the facts in the matter.

"So we need to go on a strong campaign of education. We intend to do that through the Extension Service to acquaint the consumer, particularly, the welfare consumer. By that I mean persons who are buying food with either public assistance under the form of the direct relief or through the assistance from the Department of Agriculture through the food stamp program. Provide some counseling on what is good and what isn't. And that will upset some people but we think, you know we've got to be honest with ourselves. It's no use kidding around, there is too much at stake."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, I'm Betty Maker with APHIS Meat and Poultry Inspection Program. Our employees have heard a number of rumors about the organization status of the meat and poultry inspection under the consumer affairs area. Can you tell us if we will remain in APHIS, and if not, what plans you have in store for us?"

Secretary Bergland: "We're going to make some changes. I am not sure that I know enough about it to really get into the fine tuning. But I can tell you this, we're recommending that we have an Assistant Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Affairs. Obviously, the Food and Nutrition Service would be transferred to that general area. Then we're going to do some combining. We're going to have an Assistant Secretary for Marketing, too, may I say. And in there will be the grain inspection and all of the marketing missions, and market orders. Most of the things that are in the market area are clearly definable. The one that is more complicated is APHIS.

"The plan is to transfer to the Assistant Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Affairs, under the general supervision of an administrator of some type--by that I mean that we don't know what title--those missions in USDA which are really consumer oriented. And of course, everything is consumer oriented. So please forgive me, we tend to typecast. Everybody in this room is a consumer; every farmer in the United States is a consumer; we tend to typecast by saying the consumer is the female shopper in the local grocery store, and that is an over simplification, but for the purpose of defining this one, let's accept that characterization; we plan to put into this one agency those services which have to do with inspection, grading, and with standards of fruits, vegetables, meat and poultry.

"Now that is about as finely tuned as I can get because I don't know the thing in more detail than that. But that is the general direction. Now maybe having given you that, you can kind of figure out where you fit in."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, from what you said this morning about prime farm lands and from some of your earlier actions in the Administration, I get the impression that you would like for the soil and water conservation activities to be even more strongly oriented towards accomplishing things out there on the ground. I'd like to suggest that we might have more luck if you will be what we never had before, and that is a Secretary of Agriculture who has taken the time and the interest to speak out about it more than once during his term."

"There is another department around here that passes itself off as a conservation agency or the conservation agency. I think that ought to be a misdemeanor. But in order to change that, we need you to speak out once in a while."

Secretary Bergland: "All right sir, you can count on that, because I know what it is like. I've lived on the farm. You know we've had some experience that you can't acquire by book learning. My wife and I were married in 1950 and we bought our first piece of land. We had no money. We got it on a contract or deed, 3% interest and crop payments. Nothing down, no crop. It was a mess, I'll tell you. We were four years living in that little house. We didn't even have a bathroom. It's a fact. We didn't have running water. Going out behind the house at night in Minnesota in the winter time is an experience. You don't forget it, you know."

"We had no crop, and my creditors were good. And in the fall of 1955, we had \$90 and that is all we had left. We had winter coming and I was looking for a job. I mean I looked all over and I couldn't find work. So I know what it's like to want to work and can't find it. Believe me, that is the worst kind of penalty."

"Finally, I heard somebody say there is work in Florida. They're building houses down there, and I'm a fair to middling good carpenter, so we took off. We spent half that winter living on catfish we caught near Sarasota, Fla. and orange juice we picked up off the ground because we didn't have money. We made it through the winter and things got better and here I am."

"Now I know what it is like to lose a crop. I know what it is like to see things wash away, and blow away. Believe me, this is too important a problem to just ignore or push under the rug or give it a once over lightly. We need a major commitment to this effort. We plan to take a long hard look at where we're headed here in this Department."

"You know I'm cancelling some advisory committees and people are kind of upset about that. But I know about that game. I used to pick people to go on advisory committees when I worked for Freeman and we picked people who would agree with him. I know how that works. So, we're going to put an end to that. I'm not picking on people, but actually what I need is some critical examination, not get people in there who will tell me I'm doing a good job. I mean critical, real hardboiled. But be honest about it. Don't play any games."

"And so we're going to abolish a lot of committees that are okay, I suppose. But we can save money by not having them come in. I'll just call them on the phone. But we will have somebody else take a look at us. You know, what about our conservation mission? What about this nonsense we've had now for as long as I can remember? Fights about whether or not we ought to have more or less money for ACP. And that has been the extent of our conservation dialogue. And planning parties for small watersheds."

"The Soil Conservation Service has done an excellent job, in trying desperately to call the public attention to the crying needs out there in the area of soil and water conservation, with some success. But not nearly as good as you could be and will be."

"We're going to set up a group, maybe headed by the President's Scientific Advisor, to take a look at us. At the rate we're going, what kind of a country are we going to have in 50 years? In 100 years? What does it look like to them? Get advice from people who are not on the landgrant colleges' staff looking for a research contract. You know what I mean. From people who are not trying to sell us lime, or tiling equipment, but people who can take a look at us from the outside.

"Now, we might not like what they see, and maybe we won't agree with it. But at least we ought to have them take a look, both in the area of our soil and water conservation, and our commitment and see if we're committed. Let them tell us where to go and how to get there.

"I think we can set up a clearly defined set of goals and objectives in the area of soil and water conservation, research, nutrition, and a number of areas, as well as general farm policy.

"You know I spent 6 years in the Congress and I understand that place pretty well. The thing that used to frustrate us most would be when people came down from the Administration and asked for this amount of money for this year and we'd say what do you plan to do five years from now, and they would say, we don't know, we're just working on this budget. Don't know! You know, that is half our trouble. We don't know where we're headed beyond next year. This budget year.

"So let's take a look at it and figure out where we want to be 50 years from now, and figure out where we've got to be 5 years from now, and what we have to do in next year's budget to get that done. I think we're going to rattle lots of cages, but it is going to be exciting. I mean, really, and we're not going to have the kind of money troubles we've been having. If we can come back with a strategy and a plan, any reasonable person will agree to that. Now, we may not get all the money we want, you know. I know how that goes, so we'll do the best we can. The point is we need ideas and suggestions."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, about your ideas and suggestions. Let's say maybe someone in this room had the greatest idea in agriculture that ever came about. How does that idea get into your head? It seems to me that something like the Congressmen have done in the past, with establishing local offices for individuals to talk to the Congressmen, or whatever is probably not a bad idea. The problem that we have directly is, how do we get our ideas to you? How do you propose we do that?"

Secretary Bergland: "I really don't know. Honestly, I don't know how to do it, but it is something we need to do. I think what we should probably do is set up some kind of management group here within the Department to figure out how to do it apart from the line agencies

"You know, I used to get upset when I was Area Director of ASCS and have someone out in the State Office come up with a great idea that I hadn't thought of. That kind of burned me up a little bit. I know how that is. I've been there, too.

"So we've probably got to set up a group outside of the line function at a staff level to be able to serve as sort of an internal organization, observing notions, ideas and suggestions, and staffed with people who know a good idea when they see one.

"We're willing to try anything. We're not locked into anything. We're all new here and we're green, and we're willing. But I know enough about this place to know that this is an enormous institution in terms of the body talent. And so, I don't have enough time to receive you personally, individually, because I've got other things I have to do. There are 120,000 of us here, I guess. So there just isn't enough time in the day. We have to therefore set up a system and we're looking at it. We're looking at alternatives, and if OPEDA has some recommendations in this regard, believe me, we're willing to consider everything."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, about 3 weeks ago, you mentioned that the Forest Service was an agency you would like to see kept in agriculture, but because of the general reorganization proposed by the President, that it may not be in Agriculture. Is there any more news on this?"

Secretary Bergland: "No there is no more news. For those of you who may not have heard, we've settled where the food stamp program is going to go. It is going to stay right here. We can run it as well as anybody, better than most. And we're going to run it well."

"The Forest Service is an agency which is much sought after. It has an excellent reputation in this country, and we don't know exactly how things are going to go."

"But let me tell you what I think. The President has requested authority to create a new Department of Energy, and we need that bad. The energy policy in this country is a mess. And it will stay a mess until we get somebody in charge who can call the shots and make decisions. You can't run government by committee. I mean that just won't go. You've got to have somebody finally making the decisions and I find that somebody is the President, but he has to have some help."

"So, we'll create the new Department of Energy, I hope. The impact on our Department is nominal. We will give to that new agency the right to examine all rural electrification administration loans for generating and transmission systems to see to it that it is a part of an overall, comprehensive energy strategy."

"The Department of Interior is giving over to Energy certain of its responsibilities in the area of coal, gas, and oil. I'm not sure exactly how much of that will go finally because all of this is subject to Congressional approval. It takes affirmative action on the part of the House and Senate and there'll be some changes made in all likelihood with the President's proposal."

"Now, if it should turn out that all of the Interior's mineral authorities--oil, gas, and coal--offshore and on land are transferred to the new Energy Department, then it could be argued by some that the Interior Department's mission ought to be that of the country's land management. It ought to be the land management agent for this country. Many could argue then that Forest Service logically belongs with Park Service and the BLM and the other functions of Interior. So it is not possible to tell what is going to happen."

"I don't want to get rid of the Forest Service. I think it is a good outfit. I am proud of it. Proud of those of you who work for it. But, we don't really know what is going to take place in the long run. But I don't think it really makes all that much difference. I mean, we want to run a good show and make the maximum contribution and if the combining of some missions will help, let's do it."

"I've got some ideas of my own about combining agencies and missions. You know, it is kind of a mess."

"I spent 6 years in the Congress, as you know, and one of the more difficult parts of my job was to work with some little town of 1200 out there in rural Minnesota who came and said: 'Look we don't understand this. How come there are two housing agencies in the rural areas? How come there are four departments of government involved in rural water and sewer financing? How come we have four departments of government involved in rural business lending? It doesn't make sense. So, we're going to go after that one and put the Department of Agriculture in the business of delivering rural development service, not giving it lip service.'"

"I mean we read about troubles in New York. You know the bonding troubles up there and it is a mess. Believe me, they are not alone. We've got a dozen cities in the country in money trouble of some kind or other, going from bad to worse. And won't get any better until we've taken this rural development mission seriously."

"I know lots of folks have left my country in Minnesota and gone to work for Allis- Chalmers in Detroit, or gone someplace else, looking for a job. That is all they were looking for. Just a chance to get a job and make a living. And in the last 75 years in this country, we've seen the largest migration of mankind in the history of civilization, moving from the farms and small towns to the cities of the United States. Is it any wonder that cities like New York are in trouble with one person in seven on relief? Where it costs ten times more to deliver public service than it does in Wadenna, Minn? No, it is no surprise.

'All right, bonding of New York's financial plight is not the answer. We're only dealing with the symptoms, not the real cause. The real cause is the perennial flight of people from the country to the city because they don't have a chance. And one thing we want to do is give them that opportunity by putting together a rural development program that makes sense, that can fly, give it the staff, the commitment, the support and the money, because I think the fiber of the United States can be strengthened only when we have a strong, healthy, prosperous rural environment.

"And that doesn't mean that all of us can wind up on farms. I have four sons and one farm. So, we have to provide non-farm opportunities, and we haven't figured out how to do this yet. But I'll tell you that we are going to try awfully hard, to do that which we've long neglected and some of it means realignment and reorganization, streamlining, cutting out the duplication or contradiction.

"You know the red tape and forms we've evolved over the years just boggles the mind. We were taking inventory, through Lee Corcoran, about the forms we've got to fill out around here. Boy, if I dared, I'd just tell you not to fill them out and see what happened. I can't do that. But we are going to go at it and see what we can do about that."

Employee: "Mr. Secretary, this is somewhat related to your statement about the number of farmers that have left the farm. How do you view the entry of the major banking institutions into what they call Agri-business and what would you like to see the Congress do as far as legislation in this area?"

Secretary Bergland: "Well, I think the proposition which the banking group in Chicago recently proposed, and that is the creation of a tax exempt mutual fund to receive pension funding and other investments for the purpose of buying farmland is an unmitigated, economic, and political disaster. And I have written Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Blumenthal, asking him to delay the granting of the advisory on tax status of this enterprise until we've had a chance to examine the full implications of this matter.

"But I think if it is allowed to grow, it could well alter the very essence of the American democratic process. And that is the right to own and farm land. Because those kinds of resources are so enormous, and particularly if they get the tax benefits they've requested, there is no young family that can start farming in competition with that bunch. That is an absolute guarantee. It is only a matter of how much land they'll own and how soon.

"You know, heaven help the American consumer, heaven help this world, if we destroy the essence of free family farming in the United States and replace it with the larger corporate types which I've seen.

"We hail efficiency in this country. We somehow think that it is inspired by the book. It is not. You know, bigness is not necessarily best.

"There is a big farm not far from where I live up in Minnesota. They can produce more wheat with less hired help than any place around. And if that is important, they've got it made. But, in terms of producing more wheat per acre, they can't hold a candle to me because I've got 640 acres and I give that land tender loving care. They can't do that. They're too big. Okay, so we say there're efficient.

"In this country I'm told we burn 13 petroleum calories to produce a food calorie. And in that context we rank among the world's worst system. Almost dead last. How does Sweden, how does West Germany maintain the standard of living they do burning as little fuel as they do? How do they do that? We better take a look at them.

"I don't think we necessarily have the world's best system. I'm not satisfied with the way it is. I'm restless, inquisitive, curious. Is there a better way? If we could assume petroleum would last forever, we've got it made. But you and I know that is not going to happen. How long have we got? Thirty-forty years probably. I don't know.

"And I'm not satisfied to leave things to chance. It is far too dangerous. Much, much too risky. And so we're going to try to put a stop to ag-land ventures and I'm going to press hard to get a change in the tax laws, if need be to stop this sort of proposition. It is not in the national interest. It is not in the interest of agriculture, the economy, the consumer, or anybody else. And so, we're going to stop it, at least temporarily, to examine the full impact of such a trend, and my own bias tells me it is potentially a disaster.

"Mr. Secretary, my name is Emil Jandro, and I suppose I'm probably out of bounds here to even ask this question. We're visiting your fair city. This is my first time in Washington, D. C. We're from Walhalla, N. D., up close to the Canadian Border. And we're up there farming, trying to farm, I should say, to stay alive. Now, I want to know what you have in mind in regards to the family farmer so he can stay, keep making his input, and keep farming and surviving on it? Do you have any plans in regard to support or anything that might keep the man out there? How are young people going to keep on and start farming? I'm concerned about it. I don't belong to the Department but I'm out there trying to produce a commodity that everybody needs. Thank you."

Secretary Bergland: Thank you, Emil. You're welcome, may I say. First of all, you needn't apologize. You're welcome here and we welcome your views and your attitudes. It is for people like you and the two hundred and nine million others that this Department is around here. It isn't for our own self-interest. It is for you, my friend.

"Your question is tougher. We're going to make some changes. I've issued an order, through the system, that we will never, ever again issue an economic forecast assuming normal weather. Because there ain't no such thing. I farmed 27 years and I've had normal weather twice in my life. In every other year, it has been too hot, or too cold, or too wet, or too dry.

"We're getting together a group here in USDA, qualified experts, and we're bringing in information from other agencies in this town and we're going to build up--not add to our payroll--but we're going to build up our body of knowledge in which our economists are going to give us ranges based on the laws of probability.

"What is the probability of the drought in Kansas getting worse? We don't know and we've said, well we're just going to try to pretend that the drought didn't exist. Maybe it will go away. Nonsense. It is a real thing.

"You know someone said we don't want reserves. Oh, that is a bad thing. Well, we've got it. What do we do with 1.1 billion bushels of wheat around? Pretend it doesn't exist. Nonsense, it's there. We've got the biggest carryover of rice we ever had. It won't do any good to forget it, or ignore it, or pretend it isn't around, and issue pious pronouncements about not wanting reserves. Nonsense, it is there.

"So we're going to look at the world as it really is. Not the world that we dream about, or the world of the last century, but this world today, and tomorrow, and next week.

"Now, two-thirds of our wheat is exported; forty percent of our soybeans are exported; one-fifth of the feed grains are exported. There isn't anybody in the world who knows what the exports are going to be like next year. Because we don't know whether it is going to rain in Russia next year, or in India, or in Kansas. We don't know. So we're examining alternatives.

"There is a story in the forty-first chapter of Genesis about a fellow named Joseph, the original Secretary of Agriculture in Pharaoh's Egypt thousands of years ago, who invented the normal granary. Out of experience they found that if they didn't take care of the crops when they had good years, they were suffering and dead, indeed, when the bad years came.

"And I'm not a bit interested in lowering the price of wheat just for the purpose of selling it to some gambler overseas, so that we can claim we have no reserves on hand. I think that is a disastrous policy.

"We're in the process of fashioning a brand new farm bill. It will be an exciting proposition. Different in many ways. We're going to get rid of the old basis and allotments and we're going to do lots of things to bring this thing up to speed. And we are going to recognize the lessons of the forty-first chapter of Genesis. Go and read it. Good lesson there.

"We're going to develop strategies that accommodate the inevitable. Inevitably the weather will be good some years and bad others. And there is no one who knows when it will happen and so we're going to design policies that tend to take the boom and bust out of this business of commodity pricing. You know \$12 wheat is just as bad as \$1.50 wheat. We're going to try to settle things down in a range that is business like.

"People say, well we want to take chances, we're gamblers. Nonsense. If they are gamblers, how come they buy insurance on their houses? If you really want to gamble, don't own any insurance. Then you are putting your money where your mouth is. I've had these people tell me, oh we're gamblers. We'll take our chances and when I've inquired about their insurance portfolio, it is usually filled. So they are not consistent. And we won't be impressed by that kind of mythology.

"So we're going to set policies that will continue to promote development of markets overseas. We're going to encourage policies that will use more American food as developmental tools with the hungry people of this world.

"You know I think we'll gain a lot more good will and I think we will make a greater contribution to permanent peace in this world if we'd use food, soybeans, and dried milk, instead of airplanes, tanks and guns, if you want my personal opinion.

And so we've got to figure out how to do it. It is going to take time, and the support and good will and the creative thinking of everybody in this country. We're in this thing together. And we'll have to kind of cool the rhetoric, simmer down and figure it out. But I am sure with your support, your advice, and your help, we can do it."

"Time is closed. Thank you very much."

